

# 100 GREAT AFRICANS

ALAN RAKE

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by  
**ALAN RAKE**



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**Note:** Some dates are marked r., indicating length of rule or reign, where dates of birth are not known. Many of the above dates are approximate, marked c. (see specific chapters for explanation).

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## Preface

This book is an attempt to choose and tell the stories of the hundred greatest Africans of all time. I have scoured the pages of history and have considered every country within the geographical continent of Africa. These catholic parameters allowed me to consider all great men and women from the time of the pharaohs to the present day. Yet problems of definition remain.

Many might argue that Egypt is not really Africa, and that the early Egyptian civilisation is too self contained and too distant in time to be compared with other parts of Africa.

But Egypt ruled vast parts of black Africa and then was itself ruled for centuries by black Kushite kings. Later still the Egyptian Coptic church selected the archbishops of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and Egypt controlled Sudan for long periods.

Thus a case can be made for including Egyptians on historical grounds and geographically the case is stronger still, because Egypt is part of the African continent.

More methodological problems of selection have been caused in defining Africans. I have not limited my selection to pure Africans born and bred in Africa, but have also included those whose major lifetime contribution was in Africa, or those who lived and worked in Africa most of their lives and left their mark there.

This has allowed me to include such outstanding personalities as:

\* Cleopatra who was born and bred in Egypt though she was of Hellenic descent.

\* Jan Van Riebeeck who brought the first whites to South Africa, though he was a Dutchman and returned to Holland after a relatively brief sojourn in the Cape.

\* Cecil Rhodes, who was an Englishman though he became Prime Minister of South Africa and made his fortune there.

\* Mohammed Ali, (the Khedive of Egypt, not the boxer!), who is regarded as the founder of modern Egypt, though he was originally an Albanian.

I have also included many Afrikaner leaders who claimed that they were what their name implies, white Africans.

But I have not included many explorers, missionaries, colonial governors and others who may have made their names and reputations



In December 1988 he instituted a programme of staggered local elections in different regions of the country. Voters were asked to vote for individuals (not parties) who could represent them in 18 district assemblies. Turnout was low, though this was a first hesitant step towards democratic rule.

On 10 May 1991, in response to massive international and internal pressure, he announced his acceptance of multi-party government. This *volte face* brought a burst of activity. On 17 May a law setting up a National Consultative Assembly to prepare a draft constitution was published. On 20 June conditional amnesty was granted to all political exiles asking them to return home.

The big question was whether or not Rawlings would retire and opt out of politics altogether, or whether he would try and contest the elections and turn himself into a democratically elected president.

On 28 April 1992 about half of Ghana's electors went to the polls and overwhelmingly approved the new constitution that would lead to civilian rule. In May Rawlings lifted the ban on political parties and unleashed a rush of frenzied electioneering. A plethora of new political parties made themselves known to the electorate, but Rawlings remained silent, giving no clue as to whether he would participate.

It was not until the last minute of the eleventh hour that Rawlings presented his own nomination papers and said that he would stand for the presidency. By then the opposition parties had split and divided themselves so often, that none of them seemed capable of providing clear leadership or stability in the new Ghana.

Rawlings had carefully managed the system to show that he was the only leader that could continue to deliver an improving economy and the stability in which democracy could thrive. He allowed proxy parties to campaign on his behalf and gave his opponents time to fragment and divide into meaningless smaller parties.

But the extent of his victory in the presidential elections of 3 November surprised everyone. He had won 60% of all the votes cast, far more than his four opponents taken together. The victory was repeated in the parliamentary elections which followed in December.

The opposition cried foul, but they had not protested about the elections beforehand. They had challenged Rawlings on a playing field of his own choosing and had been soundly trounced.

Rawlings was sworn in as President of Ghana on 7 January 1993 and smoothly transferred his style of government to the civilian system. He kept the key ministers who had transformed Ghana during his 11-year rule and concentrated still more specifically on maintaining the expansion of the economy.

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## About the Author

**Alan Rake** (BA, Politics, Philosophy and Economics, Brasenose College, Oxford) is Editor-in-Chief of the monthly London-based magazine *New African*. After working with *Drum* magazine from 1957, in East, West and South Africa for a nearly a decade, he returned to England to work with African publications and the newsletter *Africa Confidential* concerning the continent. He edited *African Development* until it was merged with *New African* in 1977. He founded and edited the magazine *African Business* in 1978. He has specialised in African affairs for the last 37 years.

He still travels in Africa regularly and is the author of a number of books and reference books on Africa including the *New African Yearbook*, and *Travellers' Guides to Africa* published by I.C. Publications, London. His first *Who's Who in Africa*, written jointly with John Dickie was published in 1973 and the *Who's Who in Africa* published by Scarecrow Press appeared in 1992. He is continuing to write and planning further books on African history and politics.